

APPLICATION
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TITLE: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CUSTOM
MANUFACTURE OF TEDDY BEARS

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METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CUSTOM MANUFACTURE OF TEDDY BEARS

5 CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority from Provisional Application No. 60/186,922, filed March 3, 2000, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

10 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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1. Field Of The Invention

The present invention relates to customized manufacturing of teddy bears and more particularly, to a customized method of manufacturing teddy bears by 15 customers, wherein the teddy bears are stuffed with polyester and a "bean mix."

2. Description Of The Prior Art

Teddy bars are popular items. Recently, methods and apparatuses have 20 been provided wherein patrons or customers may make their own teddy bears. Generally, a customer is provided with a cloth "skin" that serves as an outline for the teddy bear. The skin generally includes the arms, legs, head, ears and nose. The eyes are generally already sewn on, as well as the ears and the tip of the nose.

25 The customer will then take the skin of the bear to a machine that stuffs polyester into the head and body, including the arms and legs. The bear is then sewn up, combed or groomed, and then often given a "bath" with air to remove dust and any other debris that may be on the bear's skin. As a finishing touch, a ribbon or a bow-type collar may also be placed on the teddy bear.

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While the polyester generally provides a soft, yet firm "body" for the teddy bear, it can be difficult to sit the teddy bear in an upright position without extraneous support. Additionally, while the basic process for making the teddy bear will generally be entertaining for most children, and even adults, other "special" effects would 5 further enhance the entertainment value of the manufacturing process.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a teddy bear that includes polyester 10 stuffing in the main body portion and the head, but includes harder, solid particles, generally referred to as "beans," in the arms and legs for added support.

In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, the beans include confetti or glitter mixed therein. The confetti is of various shapes and sizes such as, for 15 example, dots, stars and hearts. The glitter also preferably consists of various colors.

The present invention also provides an apparatus for stuffing the teddy bear's arms and legs with the bean mix. The apparatus generally includes a supply of bean mix, and a viewing chamber for viewing swirling bean mix that is swirling therein 20 due to air pressure or a vacuum. The apparatus preferably includes a foot pedal for activating an air motor or pump that pumps the bean mix within the viewing chamber and also pumps bean mix from the apparatus through a conduit and into the bear's arms and legs. Additionally, the apparatus may include a supply of polyester and may pump or feed the polyester into the bear's body, preferably prior to feeding or pumping the bean 25 mix into the bear's arms and legs.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, upon activating the bean feeding apparatus, confetti may be blown about the area adjacent the bean feeding apparatus and thus "rain" or fall onto the customer using the machine and other 30 customers in the vicinity, thus providing an "air show."

Other features and advantages of the present invention will be understood upon reading and understanding the detailed description of the preferred exemplary

embodiments, found hereinbelow, in conjunction with reference to the drawings, in which like numerals represent like elements.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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Figure 1 is a right elevation view of a bean mix supply apparatus in accordance with the present invention;

10 Figure 2 is a front elevation view of the bean mix supply apparatus illustrated in Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a schematic illustrating an air supply system for the bean mix supply apparatus illustrated in Figures 1 and 2;

15 Figure 4 is a schematic illustrating a bean supply system for the bean mix supply apparatus illustrated in Figures 1 and 2;

Figure 5 is a schematic illustration of a teddy bear; and

20 Figure 6 is a schematic illustration of bean mix for use in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS

25 Figure 5 illustrates a teddy bear 100 in accordance with the present invention. The teddy bear includes a head 101, a body 102, two arms 103, 104 and two legs 105, 106. Preferably, the head and body are stuffed with some kind of soft filling, such as, for example, polyester, while the arms and legs are preferably filled with harder pellets or granules, commonly referred to in the industry as "beans." The beans are 30 generally made of plastic, but may be made of other materials, if desired, that provide more weight or support to the arms and legs.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment, the beans 107 are mixed with glitter, as can be seen in Figure 6. The glitter is made up of various shapes and preferably, the shapes include, for example, hearts 110, stars 111 and dots 112. The glitter is preferably of various colors.

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Figures 1-4 illustrate a bean mix supplying machine 200. The bean mix supplying machine includes a base portion 201, a mixing chamber 202 atop the base portion, and preferably a decorative top portion 203.

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The base portion includes a bean mix hopper 204 that is filled with the bean mix. The viewing chamber is in communication with the bean hopper, preferably by an air pipe system 210 as illustrated in Figure 3. An air pump or motor 211 is provided to operate the air system.

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A supply pipe 212 is also in communication with at least one of the viewing chamber and the bean hopper. The supply pipe is used to provide bean mix to the teddy bears.

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A venturi pump 215 is preferably used to move bean mix from the bean hopper into the viewing chamber. An auger (not shown) may be used to supply bean mix to the bean hopper and even to the viewing chamber. Additionally, an auger-type feed may be used to supply beans to the supply pipe to fill the teddy bears. Preferably, however, air is used to provide a quicker and tighter fill of the bears.

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The bean mix may be provided to the bean hopper either locally or from a remote location via some type of feed system (not shown).

Preferably, the bean mix machine includes a pedal 213, preferably in the shape of a bear foot, for activating the bean mix supply machine.

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Additionally, glitter may be used as confetti and supplied from either the bean supply machine or from an external source such that upon activation of the bean

supply machine, confetti "rains" or falls and swirls around onto the customer using the machine and/or others around the machine.

In accordance with the present invention, the process for making a custom
5 teddy bear by a customer includes choosing a teddy bear "skin." The skin includes the primary body, a head attached thereto, two arms attached thereto and two legs attached thereto. Soft stuffing is fed into the primary body and the head. As noted above, preferably, the stuffing is a soft substance such as, for example, polyester. The polyester is preferably blown into the body and head.

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The partially stuffed teddy bear is taken to the bean mix supply machine and bean mix is fed into the arms and legs. Bean mix swirls around in viewing chamber 202, thus providing additional entertainment for the user as they feed the bean mix into the teddy bear. Preferably, the beans are fed into the legs and arms after the polyester has
15 been placed in the head and body.

The filled teddy bear is then sewn up and "groomed" by, for example, combing and fluffing. Preferably, an air bath is also preformed to fluff the fur of the teddy bear and to clean off any dust, stuffing, and other dirt or debris that may be on the
20 exterior of the teddy bear. A ribbon or collar, or the like, is then preferably placed around the neck of the teddy bear.

Those skilled in the art will understand that the present invention may be used for other stuffed animal toys. Additionally, those skilled in the art will understand
25 that the teddy bear may be filled entirely with bean mix, or may have fewer portions filled with bean mix. For example, only the arms or only the legs may be filled with bean mix. Only a single arm or a single leg may be filled if desired. Additionally, the head and/or the body may be filled with beans in addition to or in place of the arms and legs. Hence, those skilled in the art will understand there are numerous combinations of parts of the
30 stuffed animal toy that may be filled with bean mix.

Those skilled in the art will also realize that the bean mix supply machine may be configured so that it also supplies the polyester stuffing. For example, the bean

mix supply machine may include a separate hopper or chamber that includes polyester stuffing. A second supply pipe would be used to supply polyester stuffing to the teddy bear skin. Preferably, the air system illustrated in the figures would be used to blow the polyester stuffing into the teddy bear.

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Thus, the present invention provides a stuffed animal toy that includes at least portions of its body filled with a heavier, more solid mix as opposed to soft stuffing. This provides extra support for the toy. Additionally, the present invention provides an entertaining and colorful bean mix, and an entertaining and colorful bean mix supply

10 machine. Additionally, the present invention provides a method of customizing a stuffed animal toy. The customer is allowed to make their own stuffed animal toy that is stuffed with beans and/or soft stuffing. Thus, the present invention provides a method and apparatus that allows a customer to make his own custom bean bag style stuffed toy.

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Although the invention has been described with reference to specific exemplary embodiments, it will be appreciated that it is intended to cover all modifications and equivalents within the scope of the appended claims.